



Millcreek Township School District

3740 West 26th Street • Erie, PA 16506-2096 • 814.835.5000

HEIGHT / WEIGHT / BMI

Much has been written lately about the national decline in the fitness of school children in America. If this trend is not reversed, experts feel this generation of students may be the first to have a shorter life expectancy than that of their parents. In 2002 Penn State University conducted a statewide assessment of children and youth. Their data indicated that 18% of our school children could be considered overweight, and another 17% may be considered at risk of becoming overweight. These children often have an increased risk of developing diabetes, heart disease, or other health problems. At the same time, some children are underweight and need to be evaluated to be sure they are growing properly.

These facts prompted the Pennsylvania Department of Health to develop new guidelines for the growth screening program for school children in our state. School nurses are now not only required to weigh and measure all students, they are also required to calculate the Body Mass Index-for-Age Percentile of each student.

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a measurement that compares a person's weight to their height to help determine whether their growth pattern is normal or whether they are overweight or underweight. This BMI reading is compared to those of other students of the same age and gender to compute the BMI-for-Age Percentile. For example, if your child is at the 60th percentile, it means that compared to children of the same gender and age, 60% have a lower BMI. Students who have a BMI percentile less than the 5th percentile are generally considered underweight, while those whose percentile measurements are equal to or greater than the 95th percentile are generally categorized as overweight. Those with a BMI percentile from the 85th to the 95th may be at risk for becoming overweight.

WHY IS BMI-FOR-AGE A USEFUL TOOL?

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), BMI-for-Age is used for children and teens because of their rate of growth and development. It is a useful tool because:

- BMI-for-Age provides a reference for adolescents that can be used beyond puberty.
- BMI-for-Age in children and adolescents compares well to laboratory measures of body fat.
- BMI-for-Age can be used to track body size throughout life.



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It's important to realize that BMI should be considered a screening tool and NOT a definitive measure of overweight or underweight, as the measurement does have limitations. For example, some athletes and serious dancers may have a higher than expected BMI because they have more muscle mass, which weighs more than fat mass.

Parents of students in state targeted grade levels will receive notification of their child's BMI percentile during the school year. Please remember that your child's health care provider is the best person to evaluate whether or not his/her measurements are within a healthy range. BMI-for-Age Percentile is only one tool to be used in assessing your child. If your child has been attending Pennsylvania schools, his or her growth history has been regularly recorded. If you have any questions about this information, please call your school nurse.